

Matthew 2:1-12

THE AWESOME IN THE AWE-DINARY

What fills you with awe? Is it the things of nature: an amazing sunset, a beautiful view, the power of the ocean or a cracking storm, the amazing complexity of the earth's living creatures - from the smallest to the largest? Is it art: paintings, sculptures, music, drama or writings, which you find awesome both in how they have been created and presented as well as in the message they convey? Do you find awe in people: the relationships you have, the things people accomplish, the growth you see in them as they go along the path of life? And of course, most likely, you find awe in many of these things, and perhaps in many more also. What fills you with awe?

I'm guessing that when you consider the answer to that question, most of us go to those things which are outstanding, spectacular, unusual and unique. But what about the awesome in the ordinary; the things we are surrounded by which are incredible, but we take them for granted? Our hearts which keep on pumping day after day so that we continue to wake up each morning. Our creation and society which provides us with all we need. The special people in our lives. The cars which turn on each time we start them and take us where we want to go, without us thinking about how they do that and all the engineering that's happened over the years to give us the cars we have today. The country we live in with its protections and provisions we enjoy each day, again normally taking that for granted. When we take the time to stop, and to think, there are a lot of things which are truly amazing, awesome, that we live in and are surrounded by every day.

This year we are having what I am calling a floating theme, that means it will come and go a bit in how we use it, of 'The Awesome in the Awe-dinary'. All those amazing things in our lives and in this world, from the big and spectacular to the common and unnoticed, are given to us by our amazing God. And He, over all that, is awesome, even though at times we might treat Him as a bit ordinary. And as we begin our worship in this New Year with the season of Epiphany, which basically means 'to reveal' or to 'show', with

the account of the Magi coming from the east to follow a star and worship a baby, what better time to have a first look at this theme. For, what could be more ordinary than a star, and a baby being born? What could be more awesome than God coming into the world as that baby to be the Saviour for all people, who are led to Him by the light of that star?

The Magi who came from the east, to worship the one who was born 'king of the Jews'. It's very much a part of our Christmas story, in the carols and nativity scenes, but based on what is both in this reading and soon after, it happened about two years after Jesus was born, when He and his parents were back in Nazareth. They most likely weren't kings, but still some kind of princes, priests or nobility, because normal people didn't have the time to both study the stars and then go off on long trips. And we get the number of three from the gifts they brought, when the total number of travellers would have been much larger to ensure they were safe on their long and dangerous journey.

Getting caught up on those wrong details can stop us from seeing some important parts of this story which are in here. Not only did the Magi follow a star, based on a prophecy saying this star would foretell the Messiah's birth, but when they were questioned by King Herod and his advisers, they quoted the Old Testament to say He would be born in Bethlehem. The Old Testament being quoted in the New Testament might seem ordinary, especially in Matthew's Gospel, but think about where the Magi, these non-Jews, have come from. How do they know the Old Testament and its prophecies so well? One possible explanation is that about 600 years earlier when many Jews, including the prophet Daniel, were taken to countries like Babylonia, they taught people there about these promises of God to save all people. And now, the irony is, that while God's own people are not accepting this child as their King and Saviour, these Magi are travelling from far away to see and worship Him. They don't see an ordinary baby, they see the awesomeness of God's love and sacrifice for all people.

So, they followed the star; they came, they found Him, they worshipped Him, they gave Him gifts, and they took a different path back home. What could be more ordinary than a star, and a baby being born? What could be more awesome than God coming into the world as that baby to be the Saviour for all people, who are led to Him by the light of that star?

How do we view not just that birth, but the Saviour who came for us, and the God whose plan and sacrifice it was for all this to happen in this way? The pattern of response we are given by the Magi here is to come and worship, to give our gifts, and then for our lives to be changed as we listen to God for the direction we now take. How does that look for us?

Come and worship. When the Magi seek out King Herod they said to him, “Where is the child born to be king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.” (*Matthew 2:2 CEV*) When we come across the awesomeness of God, even in the ordinariness of life, our response is to worship Him. This means to do so with other Christians, something mentioned a lot in the Bible, as together we hear and learn from God’s Word, receive His love for us in remembering our Baptism and receiving Holy Communion, and then respond in our worship with prayers and songs. We also worship alone or in smaller groups, in the things we do day to day, as we acknowledge and thank God for His blessings in even the small things of everyday life. Worship is coming together with other Christians, in an organised way, to praise God, grow together, encourage one another. Worship is also life, and a lifestyle, as we live our lives in and with God in what we do each day.

The Magi also, in finding the Saviour, gave Him gifts. Gifts for a King in gold and frankincense, plus also a gift perhaps foretelling His death in myrrh (often used for embalming in preparation for burial). As we encounter our King and Saviour, what gifts do we give to Him? We give our lives in response to all He has done for us; our lives to worship and serve God and to serve others. We are called to give in response to the many blessings God gives to us, blessings we are given for our good and our enjoyment, but also blessings God gives us so that we can be hands of God’s love in the world. Gifts fit for a King. As we consider this King and what He means to us, how do we respond in the way we give ourselves in His service?

And we are told that after the Magi had seen and worshipped the Saviour, and given Him their gifts, in a dream God guided them to go home another way. A dream, another ordinary thing, which God used to bring His love into the world. What does God use to call you in the things you do, the directions you take, in your life? Is it the actions or words of other people, the circumstances you find yourself in, the things you see and hear of around you? Do we always hear God’s call, whether it’s to give someone a helping hand or

a listening ear, to step in to fill a role that needs filling, to be a part of the change of culture in a group or wider society? Or, is God calling you to a change in direction to stop doing something you are doing so that you can walk more in step with Him, or to start doing something which you're not? The lives of the Magi were changed when they encountered this child, their King and Saviour. How does knowing Him change our lives, or how is God calling us to take new directions?

What could be more ordinary than a star, and a baby being born? What could be more awesome than God coming into the world as that baby to be the Saviour for all people, who are led to Him by the light of that star? The Awesome in the Awe-dinary. This account of the Magi travelling far, following a star, to come and see, worship, give their gifts, and have their lives changed, by this baby who would come to be both their and our King and Saviour, gives us a great way to start our year in thinking of how God's love, power, and amazingness can be found in the people, the happenings, the details, of our everyday lives. Like the Magi, may we see God both in the big and spectacular, but also daily life. May we look for Him, listen to Him, worship Him. May we follow and find comfort in the 'stars' which He gives to us, and in turn may we be 'stars' which lead others to see and know Him and His love also. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- What brings you awe in life: In the spectacular and unusual? In the normal everyday things we normally overlook?

Think about the Magi, and their response to meeting this baby who is their King and Saviour.

- How do you come and worship Him? Does coming together with others to worship get priority in your life? Do you live your life in worship, thanking God and praising Him each day in all you think, say, and do?
- How do you go in bringing 'gifts' to our awesome God? Are there parts of your life you want hold back from Him? Calls to do or to give which you are reluctant to follow? Ask God to help you to be open in how you give of yourself in response to His love for you.
- How is the direction of your life different because you know Jesus as your Saviour? Is there a direction He is calling you to take, something He is calling you to do or stop doing, which you find difficult? Pray for the insight to hear and see God's call, and for the strength to follow on the way He is calling you to go.

Pray: Thank God for showing us the greatness of His love and power both in the extra ordinary and in the ordinary things of life. Ask God to help us, like the Magi, to seek Him, worship Him, give ourselves to Him, and follow Him.

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